

# **Mystics as a Product of Cultural Tourism (On the Example of Georgia's Archeology)**

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## **Abstract**

Tourism is one of the biggest industries in the world the growth of which in a certain country is strongly stipulated by the internal stability, safe environment and an acceptable level of economic development. Orientation on the promotion of tourism requires the implementation of activities ensuring protection of historical, religious and archeological monuments; care of local folklore, traditions and customs and preservation of art and cuisine. Many countries of the world have started offering intangible resources such as myths, legends and mystics in general as tourist products. Using myths and legends as intangible tourist resources to promote tourism in Georgia has great prospects since according to the world experience and researches in psychology; it increases the interest level and motivation to visit a certain destination on both international and domestic levels. Alongside its cultural and historical resources Georgia is notably rich in myths, legends and mystical diversity enabling cultural-mystical tourism to be pushed forward. Georgia is distinguished with its variety of mystical sights. One can often witness a bunch of tourists gathered around local elderly striving to find out weird stories about a travel destination notwithstanding a language barrier; thus proving that tourists need memorable bizarre stories to connect to the destination site/s emotionally. The article focuses on three archeological monuments of Georgia (Mount Khvamli, Grakliani Hill and Vani Settlements) considered to be a treasure of the world cultural heritage in terms of architecture, history of writing, models of community life, crafts or unique samples of folklore; and concentrates on the significance of the mystics related to each discovery on the monuments as the means to promote cultural tourism in Georgia.

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**Keywords:** Legends, myths, mystics, cultural tourism, touristic product, Mount Khvamli, Grakliani Hill, Vani Settlements, Georgia's archeology

## Introduction

Tourism is one of the biggest industries in the world the growth of which in a certain country is strongly stipulated by the internal stability, safe environment and an acceptable level of economic development. Tourism industry can foster the strengthening of peace and progress in developed countries through creating work places, increasing revenues, diversifying economy, preserving environment and bringing different cultures together. Elaboration of a national strategy and inculcation of sensible legislation by the state in this direction stimulates the enhancement of tourism considerably. The latter insures some privileges: namely, it enables the states having no raw resources but basing their competitive advantage on culture, historical monuments, archeology, game preserves and natural conditions to flourish.

Orientation on the promotion of tourism requires the implementation of activities ensuring protection of historical, religious and archeological monuments; care of local folklore, traditions and customs and preservation of art and cuisine.

Many countries of the world have started offering intangible resources such as myths, legends and mystics in general as tourist products. Examples would be: Loch Ness Lake in Scotland being a popular destination because of the legend about a Loch Ness Monster making visitors spend about 50 million pounds a year for tourist services; Stonehenge in England with its legend of frozen giants dancing to worship the idle of the sun thus being inline in a circle attracting around million tourists a year bringing the site a 10-million-dollar profit in average annually; Palace of Dracula in Transylvania with its mystical story as well as a Bridge of Lies in a small town of Sibiu, Romania which will make noise and “punish” a “liar” if a lie is being uttered while standing on it; Schwarzwald “Black forest” in Germany (the color refers to dark coniferous trees) with its highest Triberg and Holy waterfalls and outdoor museum exhibiting the life of the XVI-XVII century Schwarzwald dwellers; Europe’s oldest city Knossos on Crete which was considered to be a home for Minotaur – a creature with the head of a bull and the body of a man dwelling at the center of the labyrinth under the king’s palace. Even though the city is in ruins visitors still perceive its beauty being carried away into the distant past.

Using myths and legends as intangible tourist resources to promote tourism in Georgia has great prospects since according to the world experience and researches in psychology; it increases the interest level and motivation to visit a certain destination on both international and domestic levels. Alongside its cultural and historical resources Georgia is notably rich in myths, legends and mystical diversity enabling cultural-mystical tourism to be pushed forward.

Georgia is distinguished with its variety of myths and legends. One can often witness a bunch of tourists gathered around local elderly striving to find out weird stories about a travel destination notwithstanding a language barrier; thus proving that tourists need memorable bizarre stories to connect to the destination site/s emotionally.

According to the legend our Lord, having created the world, on his way home stumbled at the Caucasus Mountain Range and accidentally scattered all the beauty he was holding in hands that consequently made Georgia the wonder of nature and indeed if you once have visited the country you cannot ignore the roots of the legend and Mount Khvamli, Grakliani Hill and Vani are among such wonders. Various mystical narrations are related to Mount Khvamli. It is said to be the oldest treasures of kings; the Argonauts Trip and name of Prometheus are also linked with Mount Khvamli. Locals determine the weather by the mount and respect it as the dwelling place of the god of weather and thunderstorm; from it the Black Sea and the Caucasus Range are both vividly seen in clear weather.

Mount Khvamli is one of the inexplicable places keeping many secrets. It has been trailed by travelers to uncover those buried secrets but inaccessible cliffs and caves would safely guard the treasures of kings being the site of interest, observation and research for scientists. Local population make the past preserved in memory come to life again with various narratives.

Based on many historical antique sources Khvamli the same Khomli was believed to be a mystical place of journeys of Greek mythical legendary heroes Argonauts and Heracles; the mount on which Prometheus/Amirani was chained by the order of Zeus. Besides, according to the Greek myth or legend Heracles delegated by Io had to walk up the left side of Pazisi (the contemporary Rioni River), reach the cave from where the water was streamed, get rid of the water, get inside the cave and save Prometheus from many years of suffering.

Supposedly an underground unseen city is there remaining pristine up-to-date; also, there is a tremendous amount of small stones scattered around that are not simple at all having imprints of shells and fins on them counting billions of years starting from the times when the place was a water surface. Who knows?! It might be Atlanta or the city of Aratta of Sumerians.

The way to Khvamli is paved with castles. Their old layers and lower coverings are archaic. The structure of the castle points to the period of construction which is rather prior to Feudal times. Consequently a question is posed: what mystery does the mount hold?

Now a few words about the links of Khvamli with astronomy: it is widely known that priests in ancient Egypt were the holders of Astronomy knowledge keeping it in secret sharing only with the few chosen. They

would relate everything happening on the earth to be reflected in the sky. If we take a constellation of Hydra on the atlas by a XVII century Polish astronomer Johanness Hevelius we can draw a curious parallel with Mount Khomli. A stretched serpent holds a bowel on its back while a raven is sitting at the end of the tail; below Hydra there is a constellation of Argo and of Centaur (or the same rider) aside. We can assume the bowel is a Holy Grail or the Golden Fleece or the sacred knowledge the Greeks aspired to be initiated with and the raven (eagle) is the one eating the (heart and) liver of Prometheus chained to a rock. During the expedition to Mount Khvamli some pictograms were discovered on the walls of the castle-cave with the images of zodiac signs: “Aquarius”, “Capricorn” Mercury on a horse and Venus the same Isis and Osiris or “Archer”, a small horse and a warrior with a spear or the same Mars, the symbol of the Sun and the key drawn in a square resembling Ankh or the key of the Nile (breath of life). The plan of the drawings of the older layers and coverings of the chapel on the top of Mount Khvamli, its layout towards the lightening and stars make us presume there was an ancient observatory there.

The scientists and explorers from the expedition exploited a special astronomical program and restored the image of stars on the sky of 5604 BC when the organization of Mercury, Venus, Mars and Archer precisely coincide with the scheme of the Khvamli cave pictogram. The noted year also matches with the last flood occurred on the Earth and the start-off of Sumerians and Georgians until up-to-date or the birth of Christ. The fact generated an assumption that the image on the wall depicts a new astronomical picture of the period after the flood. The documentary filmed by the expedition reveals and asserts to confirm the noted fact.

During the World War II in 1942 the government of Germany implemented an unjustified maneuver and landed troops in the Caucasus Mountains. The elite division waved the Third Reich Flag on Elbrus. Later the division was destroyed by a Georgian military unit on Marukhi Pass. Even today nobody knows precisely what was behind the German move. One version claims they were searching for secret relics in the mountains. If we consider Hitler’s attitude towards mystical venues the opinion will seem appropriate. Based on an unofficial report in 1939 delegated by Stalin a famous mountain climber Aliosha Japaridze headed to survey the Khvamli cave accompanied by 2 workers but it is unknown what he saw there. Presumably not much since the first official expedition again with the same Aliosha Japaridze as a head together with a team of 11 people was implemented in 1945. The team comprised of a writer Levan Gotua who described the hike in details and of a famous archeologist Gogi Lomtadze. The expedition spent several days in the cave and concluded that the treasure had been taken away and left a letter which was later recovered by

the next (second) expedition in 1984 guided by Revaz Shalibashvili. They made the footage of the cave and brought a letter had left by the previous expedition.

The next expedition to Khvamli, headed by Guram Gabidzashvili from the village Derchi in Lechkhumi and whose unexpected death at the age of 50 is also connected to some mystery, started in 2007. The outcomes of the exploration turned out to be significant but the research had been over by the year 2011. In the final year the ruins of the oldest settlements were uncovered in the bottom of the rock. It is inevitable to carry out excavations enabling Mount Khvamli to be enlisted next to the discoveries of the old world history such as Troy, Jericho, Göbekli Tepe.

The process of exploration of Grakliani archeological monument revealed a new discovery – a temple of the second century BC dedicated to the god of fertility, two altars and a one line inscription of the language unknown so far on the altar pedestal. Some scientists consider the Grakliani discovery to be unique and concentrate on its national significance. They reckon a new artifact discovered in the region of Kaspi will alter a certain stage of not only Georgia's but the world's history of writing and will have no analogy on the planet.

Prof. Vakhtang Licheli, a head of the archeological expedition assumes the unknown inscription on Grakliani altar is the earliest and proves the 2700-year-old history of using writing in Georgia. Prof. Licheli also asserts that the discovery enrolls Georgia into the elite of huge civilizations having their own writing throughout millennia.

Grakliani archeological monument is located in the region of Shida Kartli on the territory of the villages Goeti and Samtavisi of Kaspi Municipality, on the hill situated on the right bank of the river Lekhura. Overall, the artifacts uncovered on the site are one of a kind and confirm the history of continuous enhancement of Grakliani. The materials related to the issue are released in the world's leading scientific publications of France, Holland, England, Italy, Germany and Spain.

As for other grand discoveries of Grakliani, important exhibits are the Gold Plate (dated by the IV millennium BC) the only analogy of which exists in Iran, in the city of Suza; the seal (dated by the IV millennium BC) with the analogy existing in South Mesopotamia in the city of Uruk and the bakery oven the sizes of which change according to the capacity of building and which is ornamented with decorative elements.

The hill of Grakliani itself is a multi-layer archeological monument conveying three-hundred- thousand-year unceasing progress of social life from the period of the Stone Age including the Roman one. Dwellers' houses, agricultural buildings, temples and shrines belonging to the IV

millennium BC and I millennium AD are settled on the terraces of Grakliani Hill.

The historical significance of Grakliani is even more intensified by the unique architectural remain exposed on the third terrace. This is a 25 meter- wide and a 6-meter long temple complex of the years 400-350 BC. The 2-meter long walls of the temple plastered with thin layers of clay and embellished with décor, the ritual ovens and alters are still preserved in the temple complex.

Before we point out the value of Grakliani discovery, we should underline that the manuscripts of the ancient Georgian writing accomplished in Asomtavruli script were discovered since I century BC and Asomtavruli had been regarded to be the only Georgian script up until then. The earliest models written in Asomtavruli is a Stella of Davati (367) discovered in Dusheti municipality in the village Davati; a 433-year-old inscription of Palestine; a construction inscription of the year 493 of Bolnisi's Sioni; Palimpsest manuscripts of the V-VI centuries; inscriptions of the cross of Mtskheta of the VI-VII centuries, etc.

According to the linguist Avtandil Arabuli the unique discovery of Grakliani is sensational and beyond the sphere of fantasy, therefore he restrains himself from commenting on it. He declares his colleagues have not seen the inscription yet and will be able to make any judgment or discuss its uniqueness only after seeing it. The scientist wonders about the type of the inscription, whether it is Asomtavruli or its variation, how well it is read, what its date is, etc. A. Arabuli claims: "it would be more realistic...." for him if the inscription was dated by the period of the king Parnavaz or later, or by the brink of the new millennium. "There was a big fuss at a time about inscriptions of Nekrisi as well and they are still not dated properly". The scientist supposes Nekrisi inscriptions are older than Christian captions. Academician Levan Chilashvili would date them by the III-IV centuries. "When we date the inscription of Bolnisi's Sioni for example, we can be precise since the caption mentions the bishop of the time. In case of Nekrisi, we do not have anything of the sort. But Nekrisi inscriptions are discovered on the place where Pagan fire-worshipping temple was sighted. The temple is in ruins now and there is no sign of Christianity on Nekrisi inscriptions. Therefore, the scientist Levan Chilashvili reckoned it preceded Christianity, but other scientists are skeptical about the conclusions and are doubtful about one thing. Inscriptions may not contain any Christian signs and belong to a bit later period since Christianity was not spread over the territory of Georgia at once and simultaneously" - remarks A. Arabuli. He casts no doubt in the professionalism of Vakhtang Licheli and is sure the latter would not spread any information on the Grakliani discovery if he were not quite certain about it. However, the circle of scientists needs to get sure that the indication of the

century is correct. Even if a single word had been discovered on Grakliani it would have been priceless for us, let alone the whole inscription. The date is not the most substantial here, but what matters more is whether Georgian writing existed before Christianity” – states A. Aabuli.

The researchers Ivane Javakhishvili, Ramaz Pataridze and others assume Georgian Asomtavruli script stems from Phoenician and not from Greek. And if it is true, if in the historical past Phoenician served as the root for Georgian and Georgians had their own writing before Christianity, then Grakliani inscription can be freely regarded as the oldest. Thus, the discovery will firstly prove that Georgian Asomtavruli script comes from Phoenician and Ivane Javakhishvili’s assumption will be justified, but all these is only a supposition by for now” – asserts A. Arabuli.

Historian Farnaoz Lomashvili also regards Georgians were supposed to have writing earlier than the accepted truth. For instance, Ivane Javakhishvili assumed Georgian script existed in the VIII-VII centuries BC before we moved from Cappadocia. However, Simon Janashia and other scientists rejected the idea and claimed we came earlier, in the III millennium. F. Lomashvili considers the scientific world needs more information about the Grakliani discovery. He finds some contradictions like “if we, Georgians, came in the third millennium, at a time only Sumerians had their writing system, so we would not have been able to bring it. If we created the script here how come we did not meet any other patters somewhere else?! Or which is the earliest temple on Grakliani hill whilst there is not a single house or a village on Trialeti surroundings?! It is hard to believe we had temples and castles by then. Thus, the historian needs more proof that we were able to build temples, since you have to know how to build and then make inscriptions on them, it cannot be backwards”. He claims he knows the only Pre-Christian inscription and it is Armazi bilingua – a bilingual epitaph, gained by the archeological excavations in Mtskheta, one text of which is written in Greek and the other one in Aramaic. He adds “if there is anything new discovered on Grakliani, we should only embrace the fact and consider every single version, even the one that Grakliani inscription might be Sumerian but we cannot state anything confidently by for now”.

Promotion of Grakliani is a main priority of the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia and the National Agency of Cultural Heritage Protection of Georgia. Archeological exploration works and arrangement of touristic infrastructure are currently being processed on the monument. This is an unrecoverable process to provide open roadside museum space and modern conditions to expose the ancient culture. Everything is being done in order to decipher the discovered inscription on a

highly professional stage so that the achievement of Georgian scientists is confirmed and proved on an international scientific level.

The head of Grakliani expedition Vakhtang Licheli is preparing an express publication and a report to present to the National Agency of Cultural Heritage Protection of Georgia. The materials will be sent to international organizations of cultural heritage sphere.

Nationally significant Grakliani Hill clearly expresses the policy of the state in the field of monument protection. This archeological monument exposed in the process of building Tbilisi-Senaki-Leselidze road promises to reveal some more interesting discoveries as specialists predict. The budget of 2016 counts 400 000 GEL to be spent on the protection and saving of cultural heritage within the frames of the program 2016 according to the plan. The sum will be used to continue the large-scale exploration of Grakliani and to organize touristic infrastructure.

One of the relevant cities of Old Colchis, which flourished in the III century BC, was situated on the territory of Vani in the Era of Antiquity. Consistent systematic excavations have been held in Vani since 1947. A city like settlement was progressed in the landmark on the basis of the ancient ruins lavishly fixed on the nearby territories (Kechinara, Sulori Castle, Gora, Bagineti, Inashauri, Dzulukhi, Bughnari, Bzvani) and on its East (Persati, Zekari, Baghdadi). The earliest so far gained archeological material about Vani Settlements is dated by the VIII-VI centuries BC and is revealed by fragments. The settlement had two substantial time phases of being a true city: VI-IV centuries BC and the beginning of the III century BC; and the mid of the I<sup>st</sup> century BC.

The first phase is represented with wooden cult and residential buildings; altars for sacrifice curved in the rock; cultural layers containing various ceramic material and luxurious burials (diadems decorated with forged images, dewed earrings and temple rings of tremendously various kinds, bracelets with sculptural images of animals, bowl, heraldic images, necklaces, etc.); silver jewelry; bronze and clay pottery.

The pottery of imported clay (black figured, red figured and black stained) and steel pottery (patera/phiale, oinichoia, kylixes, aryballos) confirm extensive commercial-economic and cultural relations with the Greek world. By the time (VI-IV cc, BC) Vani was the center of one of the political-administrative units of Colchis and the residence of the ruling class. The III century BC starts a new era/phase in the history of the old city of Vani which becomes a great Templar center. The defensive wall, the architectural complex of the gate, the building with counter-forces, a round temple, a seven-staged altar, sanctuaries and other cult and social buildings with monumental lion statues, pillars decorated with divinity images, bronze miniature sculptures, masks and Greek ceramics found in the archeological



excavations belong to the III century BC. The ancient city was destroyed in the mid of the I<sup>st</sup> century BC. Subsequently, Vani declined to a village and was officially granted a status of a town only in 1981.

The majority of the material discovered during Archeological excavations and expeditions in Vani (since 1985) are preserved in the Archeological Museum opened on September 25, 1985. The currently functioning museum started a unique golden fund in 1987 storing one of-a-kind patterns of ancient goldsmiths from the remnants of Vani along with other unique pieces of the ancient Colchis exhibited in the museum.

Vani is also related to the myth about Argonauts. There is an assumption that the kingdom of powerful Aeetes was located on the territory of Vani and Jason sailed away with the king's daughter oracle Medea exactly from this particular place. A 20<sup>th</sup>-century British explorer, historian and writer Timothy (Tim) Severin during his Jason Voyage, while identifying the landmarks visited by Jason, dropped his anchor and erected the mock-up model of the ship Argo precisely in Vani.

## Conclusion

Based on the information about provided monuments (Mount Khvamli, Grakliani Hill and Vani), Georgia's archeology is considered to be a treasure of the world cultural heritage in terms of architectural monuments, models of community life, crafts or unique samples of folklore. Therefore they can be regarded as the sphere of sustainable tourism. Its diverse natural resources enable the development of adventurous tourism for climbers, hikers, cliffhangers. Rafting is also possible on the rivers as well as camping, hunting, fishing. The routes and itineraries need to be processed, hiking tours to be organized and hotels and other accommodation means need to be constructed in order to provide tourists with adequate shelters according to the level of comfort and their personal desire. We think development of mystical-cultural, sustainable or adventurous tourism will foster the rational utilization of natural resources, will increase the employment range, growth of revenues and bring new investments as soon as all these resources are entirely assimilated and implemented.

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